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Cosmetic Reactions to Artificial Fingernails

I SEE ONE OR TWO PATIENTS every day with acrylic nail problems. Here is basically what happens with an acrylic nail: A woman applies a topical irritant chemical on the outside of the nail. If an irritant chemical is applied to the outside of the skin anywhere, dead scale piles up. When applied to the surface of the nail, dead keratin begins to pile up underneath the nail—a normal response to an irritant substance. If a woman with acrylic nails puts her hands into water, all this dead material that is underneath the nail is soaked out, and a pocket occurs that is an ideal place for water to accumulate and stay. The main way the skin degerms itself is by being too dry for the survival of organisms. When there is a pocket underneath the nail, all kinds of garbage organisms grow under there—*Pseudomonas*, *Aspergillus* and others. How do I treat these? Basically, if a patient is having trouble with discoloration from all the various organisms, I recommend putting a drop of clindamycin phosphate topical solution (Cleocin T, for example) underneath the nail two times a day. This dries it out and also helps kill off all the saprophytic organisms. The other treatment I usually use is triamcinolone acetonide (Kenalog) spray or one of the other steroid sprays. I advise patients to take the spray with the scalp adapter and cut it short so it can be sprayed right up underneath the nail; this gets a small amount of steroid there to cut down on the irritation and a little antibiotic to cut down secondary infection. This is usually a one-visit procedure after I have explained to a patient what is going on and what to expect.

Silk nails are coming in now. I see very little problem with silk nails except when they break off. Then a super strength, fast-drying glue is used to put them back on, which again causes numerous allergic reactions.

—ORVILLE J. STONE, MD

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